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## DISCUSSION.

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### PARTY GOVERNMENT.

In the ANNALS for November, 1891, Professor Anson D. Morse has stated, with much clearness, some of the advantages of party government in a Republican state.

The study of these advantages might, however, lead to an exaggerated idea of their importance, if we should neglect to consider at the same time such disadvantages as are not merely accidental and curable, but apparently unavoidable and permanent in the operations of such political parties as we now have.

Among the most important functions of these organizations are the selection of candidates and the adoption of a platform or declaration of principles. These responsible duties are intrusted to conventions, composed of delegates chosen for the purpose at the party elections, known as the primaries.

Those who have so far conformed to the rules of a party as to be entitled to vote at its primaries may be divided into two classes, as follows: 1. Citizens who have no special advantages to gain, and whose only motive for participation is their desire for good government.

2. Those who are actuated by personal ambition or hopes of securing office, contracts or pecuniary benefits.

In order to carry the primaries a considerable amount of time and labor must necessarily be expended. The voters must communicate with each other; views must be compared and harmonized; candidates suggested, interviewed and agreed upon; tickets prepared and supplied, and concert of action secured.

This labor is undertaken with eagerness and enthusiasm by the men who are working for the offices or other personal

benefits, and are actuated by purely selfish motives. But the majority of citizens, engrossed as they are with private business and family cares, have neither time nor inclination for such tasks. And when their reluctance is overcome, as it occasionally is by their sense of public duty, they are likely to find that their opponents have no hesitation in resorting to misrepresentation, trickery or fraud, in order to control the result. Under these circumstances a small, but well-disciplined, energetic and unscrupulous minority can generally defeat the honorable and patriotic majority. It is therefore not surprising that honest and industrious citizens are apt to conclude that it is useless for them to take part in such contests.

The growth of this feeling is particularly noticeable in our large cities. Efforts to arrest it are only successful in rare instances, and it seems inevitable that the primaries must continue to be gradually abandoned more and more to the control of the class generally designated as politicians.

These gentlemen may have great abilities and many good qualities, but for the reasons just stated, their positions cannot, except in rare cases, be either won or retained unless their dominant motives are personal and partisan advantage; moral principles and the interests of the public being secondary considerations. Public offices, contracts and patronage are what they work for and what they must have, by fair means if possible, but if not, then by whatever means may be necessary. For this purpose they are obliged to combine among themselves and submit to such leaders as may seem best able to direct their efforts, and to secure and apportion among them the prizes they covet. Having once acquired complete control of a nominating convention, their natural desire, is of course, to nominate such candidates as will best serve their own personal interests, and in the absence of factional fights among themselves, the only real check upon this desire is their fear of losing enough of the more independent voters to turn the scale in the general elections.

This conflict between what they would like to do and what

they dare to do, usually results in their nominating such men as have no more honesty and independence than may seem to be absolutely necessary for ultimate success. And if they can secure candidates who are generally believed to be able and honorable, but who will really obey and assist the spoils-men, the temptation to nominate them, and thus deceive and outwit the people, can hardly be resisted.

In the construction of a party platform the leaders are naturally governed by similar motives, and, instead of publishing a frank statement of their real objects and intentions, they are disposed to adopt whatever may seem most likely to attract the voters. In their effort to do this they seek to treat almost every subject of public interest, but there are necessarily some points in regard to which even the members of their own party are divided, and it is one of the defects of party government that while many voters find sentiments which they disapprove in each platform, they can see no alternative but to cast their ballots for one or the other, and thus seem to endorse and support ideas to which they are really opposed.

It would appear, therefore, that our system of political parties must necessarily tend to place the selection of our candidates and the declaration of our principles in the hands of a small minority of able but comparatively selfish and unscrupulous men. If this tendency was confined to either party, it might be possible to hold it in check by voting for the nominees of the other; but the present system practically confines the choice of the people to the candidates of the two principal parties, all of them having been selected and nominated by similar methods, and therefore characterized by a similar lack of unselfish patriotism and moral principle. However dissatisfied the voters may be with the candidates of their own party, they are naturally disposed to believe that the candidates of the other party, having been chosen in the same way, are at least as bad. They have therefore no means of expressing their preference for better men, and their votes must be determined by the attractions

of a more or less unsatisfactory and untrustworthy political platform, rather than by any considerations of personal honor or fitness.

Under such a system, if a candidate belongs to a party which happens to be on the most popular side of some leading question, like the tariff or silver coinage, his lack of integrity or personal ability must be very glaring to prevent his election. And when he takes his seat in a legislative body, and it becomes his duty to make a careful study of some important question, to sift the evidence and reach a wise and just conclusion, he, who should be like an impartial judge or an unprejudiced jurymen, may find that he is only the bond servant of the leaders of his party, a mere automaton for the registering of their decrees. It is in this way that our legislative assemblies are slowly losing their character as deliberative bodies, and yielding more and more to the dictation of irresponsible partisan chiefs, or the decrees of a secret caucus.

While it is true that there are many exceptional instances, and occasional popular uprisings, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that our general submission to the rule of political parties tends to lower our moral standards, corrupt our people, and subject our National, State, and Municipal governments to a class of men who care far more for personal and partisan success than for either the honor or material interests of those they profess to serve.

To discuss the possibility of devising better methods would be beyond the scope of the present paper, which is only intended to suggest a few of the reasons why we should not look upon the present system as satisfactory.

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